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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000109

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: MODERATE IMAMS IN BASRAH

REF: (A) BASRAH 035 (B) BASRAH 043 (C) BASRAH 049

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (S) Summary: During the past two months the Regional Embassy Office (REO) has met regularly with moderate Shia and Sunni clerics to follow their efforts with regards to the current security situation in Basrah. Independent and moderate, these clerics currently represent the best alternative to counteract the influence of religious hardliners and the political and tribal leaders who are the sources of violence in the city. However, lacking the support of a militia, tribe or political party, these moderate clerics have been limited to the sidelines and unable to influence current events. Realizing this problem they may band together to form a political party and pool their available resources and speak with a unified, powerful voice for change in Basrah. End Summary.

Who are they?

12. (S) The moderate Shia and Sunni clerics are well known contacts of the REO. Sheik Khalid al-Mulla, a prominent Sunni imam, has been an outspoken critic of the Sunni insurgency and sectarian violence (see Ref A). He also has been a steadfast supporter of the Coalition Forces, advocating cooperation and dialogue. Basrah Provincial Council (BPC) member and Shia cleric, Sayed Bahaa Jamal al-Deen, mentioned to the Deputy Regional Coordinator (DRC) on June 5 that Sheik Khalid has come under a lot of pressure from the Sunni community for his message of tolerance and cooperation. Sheik Khalid, on the other hand, has pointed to his Shia colleagues, Sayed Bahaa Jamal al-Deen and Sayed Abdul Ali al-Musawi, as the ones who can effectively communicate that message to the Shia community.

13. (S) Provincial Council member Sayed Bahaa Jamal al-Deen is well respected by a wide range of leaders in Basrah (see Ref B). His moderate tone and his work with the Basrah community have given him a good reputation among the local population. Sayed Bahaa founded a local NGO, the Al Hadi Charitable Association, that focuses on community service projects such as neighborhood trash pick up and renovating local schools. Basrah Provincial Council (BPC) member Dr. Hamid al-Thalmi (Iraqi National Accord) commented that Sayed Bahaa would make a good governor for Basrah because he is independent and well respected. However, he added that Sayed Bahaa would never become governor since he does not have the backing of a political party. Sayed Bahaa was similarly dismissed as irrelevant by Sayed Youssef, the leader

of Thar Allah, who said that his lack of affiliation with a political party rendered him powerless.

¶4. (S) Sayed Abdul Ali al-Musawi is the son of the one of the most prominent and wealthiest Shia imams in Basrah, Sayed Ali al-Musawi (see Ref C). He is the "CEO" behind the al-Musawi Group, a business conglomerate that encompasses nine different companies as various as construction, computers, agricultural, fuel and printing. Sayed Abdul Ali is open in his approach to both the Sunni and Christian communities and is not actively engaged in local politics although he maintains friendly relations with most BPC members including the Governor.

What they are planning to do

¶5. (S) In the meeting on June 5, Sayed Bahaa hinted that he would explore the possibility of organizing a political party that would include Sheik Khalid, Sayed Abdul Ali al-Musawi and prominent tribal sheiks such as Sheik Mansour al-Kanaan (see Ref C). Sheik Mansoor, a former BPC member, is the leader of the Al Kanaan tribe, one of the largest tribes in Basrah. The DRC confirmed the possible formation of this new political party in a June 11 meeting with Dr. Abdul Jabbar H. Humadi, the Director of the Al Hadi Charitable Association, the NGO founded by Sayed Bahaa. Dr. Abdul Jabbar said that the above moderate clerics have reached out to nine tribal leaders and an agreement had been reached to form a new political party called, "The Independent Gathering to Save Basrah." In addition to Sheik Mansour, the party includes Sheik Muzahim of the Al Timimi tribe, another large and very influential tribe in Basrah. According to Dr. Abdul Jabbar, a number of tribal leaders have served as senior officers in the Iraqi Army and therefore have considerable experience in managing a large organization and groups of people.

¶6. (S) Dr. Abdul Jabbar listed the three main goals of the nascent party: the reformation of the Iraqi Police Service; a total ban on carrying weapons in public; and the disbanding of

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all militias. He added that the members of the party intend to take control of the BPC during the next provincial elections and asked that news of this new party be kept secret. Dr. Abdul Jabbar feared that its members would become targets of assassination if other political parties became aware of its formation. Finally, Dr. Abdul Jabbar pointed out that the party would be open to everyone, Shia, Sunni and Christian, adding that "even Jews would be welcomed."

¶7. (S) Comment: Although respected, the moderate clerics in Basrah have been dismissed in the past as being ineffective and powerless because they lacked a militia or political party. However, if they unite and organize a new political party, they could be a force to be reckoned with in the next provincial elections. Sayed Bahaa and Sheik Khalid would effectively communicate the party's message with Sayed Abdul Ali providing the funding and the tribal leaders the organization and the loyalty of large numbers of followers. End Comment.
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